23.

A SERMON

Preach'd before the

QUEEN

AT

St. *JAMES's* CHAPEL,

On *Wedneſday, March* 15, $17\frac{09}{10}$.

BEING

The Day appointed by HER MAJESTY for a General FAST and HUMILIATION, to be obſerv'd in a moſt Solemn and Devout Manner, for obtaining the Pardon of our Sins, and imploring God's Bleſſing and Aſſiſtance on the Arms of Her Majeſty and Her Allies engag'd in the preſent War; and for Reſtoring and Perpetuating Peace, *&c.*

By *ROBERT MOSS*, D.D. Chaplain in Ordinary to Her MAJESTY, and Preacher to the Honourable Society of *Grays-Inn.*

Publiſh'd by Her Majeſty's Special Command.

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SERMON

Preach'd before the

QUEEN

AT

St. JAMES's CHAPEL,

On [illegible] 17[illegible]

BY

The [illegible] in ORDINARY to her Majesty, and Rector of [illegible] in Oxfordshire.

LONDON:

[illegible]

Eccles. VIII. xi.

Because Sentence against an evil Work is not executed speedily; therefore the Heart of the Sons of Men is fully set in them to do Evil.

THE Degeneracy and Corruption of Mankind, so much and so justly complain'd of, betrays it self in nothing more than in this, That Men are so far from thankfully accepting the manifold Tokens of God's Goodness, and Loving Kindness towards them, that they are much apter Industriously to set themselves to Defeat, what lyes in them, the gracious Designs of his Providence, and to pervert those very Means which the Divine Wisdom hath thought fit to use, the better to keep them within the Bounds of their Obedience, to reclaim them from the Errors of their Ways, and to make them happy both here and hereafter.

And among the many Instances of this Kind, none more Notorious, none more Disingenuous than that which the Preacher here Remarks, and every Day's Observation furnishes fresh Examples of; namely, Mens hardening themselves in their Wickedness upon Presumption of Impunity. Which Presumption they most unreasonably and impiously Build upon their unde-

ſerv'd Experience of God's Patience and Forbearance for the time paſt.

Becauſe Sentence againſt an Evil Work is not executed ſpeedily; therefore the Heart of the Sons of Men is fully ſet in them to do Evil.—— That is,

" Becauſe Sinners are not immediately ſeiz'd by Ven-
" geance, and haled, as it were, to publick Execution;
" becauſe ſuch Examples of Terror are not perpetual-
" ly before Mens Eyes, therefore They who are wick-
" edly bent, hug themſelves in their Security; They
" grow careleſs and fearleſs, not dreaming of any
" Danger; or at leaſt putting the Evil Day off to a
" very great Diſtance, and flattering themſelves, that
" the God with whom they have to do is exceeding
" Merciful, even to Eaſineſs, and that the ſlighteſt, and
" the lateſt Repentance will be ſufficient to appeaſe
" Him.

Theſe, and ſuch as Theſe, ſeem to be the *Thoughts* that preſumptuous Sinners cheriſh in their Hearts, to embolden themſelves in their Sins; if that deſerves to paſs for *Thinking*, which is indeed the Effect of a moſt wretched Infatuation, and is equally injurious to God's Honour, and pernicious to their own Souls. In order therefore, both to wipe off the foul Imputation that is caſt upon Providence by ſuch harden'd Offenders, and to give ſome Check to the Progreſs of daring Impiety, I ſhall, in this Diſcourſe,

I. Apply my ſelf to prove, that the ordinary Procedure of Divine Providence, in delaying or ſuſpending the Puniſhment of Sinners in this World, is agreeable

ble to the trueſt Meaſures of Goodneſs, Wiſdom, and Juſtice. And,

II. As conſequent upon this, I ſhall ſhew, That it is a very unjuſt Objection to a very Kind Providence, to imagine, that This is any Encouragement to Sin; and a very grievous Abuſe for Sinners to make it ſo. And then,

III. I ſhall intimate, what Conſtruction and Uſe Men, in Reaſon and Conſcience, ought to make of ſuch God's providential Diſpenſations. And This I ſhall offer with a particular Regard to Our ſelves, and the Occaſion of the preſent Solemnity.

I. I ſhall apply my ſelf to prove, that the ordinary Procedure of Divine Providence, in delaying or ſuſpending the Puniſhment of Sinners in this World, is agreeable to the trueſt Meaſures of Goodneſs, Wiſdom, and Juſtice.

But, before I enter upon the Proof of this Point, it may not be amiſs to premiſe a judicious Obſervation of *Plutarch*, a learned Heathen, who hath himſelf treated on this very Argument! † And he Prefaces his Diſquiſition with this Caution, that the eaſieſt and the ſureſt way of anſwering all Difficulties, is to ſay, That God is the only wiſe Phyſician, who knows how to apply the Remedy to Wickedneſs, as every one's Caſe requires, in the proper Seaſon, and the moſt effectual Manner. It would become Us therefore, even according to this Heathen, to acquieſce in God's Method, though we were unable to give any ſatisfactory Account of it. And yet He attempted, and not unſucceſsfully,

† *Vide* Plut. Περὶ τῆς εἰς τὸν θεὸν βεβαίας τιμωρίας. Pag. 549. 550.

fully, to account for it from the meer Light of Nature; and therefore We, who have Revelation to guide and enlighten our Enquiries, need not doubt of finding all reasonable Satisfaction, and clearly discovering, how agreeable this Method is to the truest Measures of Goodness, Wisdom, and Justice.

Those I conceive to be the truest Measures of Goodness, Wisdom, and Justice, which are every way worthy of God, and entirely consistent with each other. For God being infinite in These, as in all other his Perfections, it must never be suppos'd, that the Exercise of his Goodness should be any Impeachment to his Wisdom, or Obstruction to his Justice: And as little is it to be suppos'd, that his Wisdom should ever deviate in the least from his Justice, or Goodness; or his Justice, again, act separate from either of the other Two.

Now it will appear, upon Examination, that, in delaying or suspending the Punishment of Sinners in this World, there is a most admirable Harmony of Divine Goodness, Wisdom, and Justice:

And this will appear from these Reasons following. (1.) Because the contrary Method would have been altogether unreasonable and impracticable. (2.) Because there are several excellent Purposes serv'd in this way, which perhaps could not otherwise be so well pursued. (3.) Because there is a sufficient Discouragement to Sin notwithstanding.

(1.) The contrary Method would have been altogether unreasonable and impracticable. By saying it would

would have been unreasonable and impracticable, I mean at least, that it were not to be reconcil'd with all the cleareſt Notions we can frame to our ſelves of the Divine Perfections; nor with the plain Intendment of Providence and Grace, both in Governing and Redeeming a World of Sinners.

For whatever abſolute Power, and rigid Juſtice, might do or juſtifie, This is certain, that the Government of the World ſuppoſes its Preſervation; and Both muſt be the equal Care of a wiſe and good Providence. But if it were neceſſary to the well-governing the World, that Sinners, upon the Commiſſion of any Sin, ſhould immediately be ſeiz'd in the very Act, and puniſh'd to the Extremity, the degenerate Race of Mankind had long ſince been rooted out, and the Earth wholly diſpeopled. So that, upon this Suppoſition, God could not govern the World without deſtroying it; which were ſuch a Defect of Wiſdom, or ſuch an Inconſiſtency between Wiſdom and Juſtice, as cannot be admitted in a Being that is abſolutely perfect.

It is true, God did once ſweep away a whole Race of Sinners (eight Perſons only excepted) by a Deluge of Waters, which ſtands Recorded for a Monument of his Vengeance to all ſucceeding Generations. But he promiſed, that he would not *any more ſmite every Thing living, as* he had *done*; and that *while the Earth remaineth, Seed-time and Harveſt, and Cold and Heat, and Summer and Winter, and Day and Night* ſhould *not ceaſe*. And this his Promiſe, as it

* Geneſis viii. 21, 22.

flowed

ſlowed from his infinite Goodneſs, ſo was it founded upon this wiſe Reaſon, that ſuch extream Rigour, had it been repeated, could not well have been made to conſiſt with the Preſervation of the World, nor indeed with the Nature and State of Mankind, by whom it is Inhabited.

For it is to be remembred, that Man was created a free Agent, capable of ſerving and glorifying God; and that he was ſent into this World, to perform this reaſonable Service; and to give Proof of his Ingenuity and Obedience. But this End had in great meaſure been defeated, if it had been the fix'd Decree of Heaven, to puniſh Sinners to the uttermoſt, without the leaſt Reprieve or Reſpite. For though the Terror of certain and ſudden Vengeance might, muſt indeed, have over-aw'd Men into a forc'd Compliance with their Duty; yet this had been no proper Trial of Creatures endow'd with an ingenuous Freedom; nor had there been much of Virtue in ſuch their Obedience, wherein their natural Liberty, if not wholly ſuperſeded, had at leaſt been over-born by a Degree of Violence hardly poſſible to be reſiſted. And it is not to be imagin'd, that a wiſe God would have created Man in Nature free, on purpoſe, as it were, to ſubject Him, in his whole Conduct, to the Fetters of a fatal Neceſſity.

Beſides, ſuch a Rigorous and haſty Execution of Sinners, as we are now ſuppoſing, would have been flatly contrary to God's declar'd Will and Counſel, relating to Mankind. For no ſooner had our firſt Parents ſinned, and thereby forfeited the Title which God had given

gin'd them to Happiness and Immortality, but that, in Compassion to them, and their Posterity included in them, He gave them the comfortable Promise of a *Messiah*, and enter'd into a second Covenant with them, the main Condition of which (on our Part) is unfeigned Repentance. This Condition we are frequently call'd upon in Scripture to perform: God's Prophets do most earnestly inculcate it: St. *John Baptist*, the Fore-runner of Christ, prepared the Way for his Kingdom by this Doctrine: In one Word, Repentance and Forgiveness is the very Doctrine that the Saviour of the World himself Preach'd, and left in Charge to his Apostles to propagate through all Nations.

Since then Remission of Sins upon Repentance is the undoubted Privilege of the Covenant in Christ; since God demands the One of Us, in order to confer the Other upon Us, it is plain, there must be a competent Time allowed for our Probation and Recovery: Because otherwise the Promise of God, and this inestimable Privilege, would be of no Avail to us. But now, if Vengeance were always ready to lay hold on the Sinner, and dispatch him out of hand, it is as plain, there would be no Place left for Repentance. And, at that Rate, all the pathetical Exhortations and Invitations to Repentance, so often reiterated in the Bible, had stood there to no purpose. Which is too harsh and impious a Thought, to be entertain'd concerning the God of Truth, as well as Goodness, Wisdom, and Justice.

Wherefore I conclude, that such a Method of punishing Sinners, would have been unreasonable and im-

practicable: Because, admitting the Supposal, the World could not have subsisted; or, if it could, Men would have been deprived of their natural Freedom, and constrain'd to be good against their Will, (which is in truth scarce Good at all) or else they would have been plung'd at once into irrecoverable Ruin, without the Opportunity or Possibility of Repenting.

Whereas God's Patience in bearing with Sinners, and respiting the fatal Sentence, is fairly consistent with the Preservation of the World, and its good Government too, as we shall see clearly in the Sequel: And it is likewise accommodated to the Nature and State of Mankind, as they are free Agents, and upon their Probation; and no less to the Tenour of the Covenant of Grace, which leaves Room, and affords Time, for their Repentance. This therefore is the Procedure, that should seem to fall in exactly well with the truest Measures of Goodness, Wisdom, and Justice, acting together in perfect Harmony. But

(2.) This Point may be farther confirm'd and illustrated, from the several excellent Purposes, that are more effectually serv'd in this Method of proceeding, than perhaps otherwise they could be.

As for Instance first, This is the Method that keeps up the Virtues and Graces of good Men in constant Exercise, and greatly helps towards their Continuance and Improvement in well-doing.

For if wicked Men were immediately snatch'd away upon the Commission of any Wickedness, and made to cease from the Face of the Earth; and good Men

were

were to be left in full and quiet Possession of the World, without any Molestation from bad Neighbours, it may well be question'd, whether so much Ease, and Peace, and undisturb'd Enjoyment, would not be dangerous, and even hurtful to them. For Paradise seems to have been made only for a State of perfect Innocence; Our lapsed Nature plainly stands in need of Discipline, but cannot bear Indulgence: And such an Indulgent Providence might be too liable to be abus'd, and minister Occasion, even in Good Men, to Security and Sloth; if not to a Fondness for this present World, and a Forgetfulness of That which is to come.

But since, by God's Permission, the Good and Bad live promiscuously together; since the former are often exposed like Sheep in the midst of Wolves; since Treachery and Dissimulation, Slandering and Backbiting, Oppression and Revenge are such busie Actors upon this Stage of Disorder, and make human Life so unquiet and unsafe, This, tho' sometimes a Vexation to Righteous Souls, helps to loosen their Affections from this Earth, and place them on Things above: This tries and strengthens their Faith, and fixes their Trust in God: This trains them up to Patience and Resignation, to Mortification and Self-denial; it purges off all their Dross, and makes them more Spiritual and Heavenly-minded, and fitter for the Fruition of Cœlestial Joys. And certainly that Method of dealing with Sinners in this World, must be most agreeable to Goodness, Wisdom and Justice, which contributes so much towards

the exerciſing, refining, and perfecting God's own Elect.

And again, which is ſtill more, this Method of Providence is not only beneficial to good Men, but even to the wicked: For as it gives them All Space for Repentance, ſo it makes them Monitors and Remembrancers to each Other. It may indeed ſeem ſtrange, that an impenitent Sinner ſhould become a Teacher of that Righteouſneſs, which he is not willing to learn: But 'tis no wonder at all, that one Sinner ſhould be a Plague to another. For they all naturally are ſo; the Objects of their Luſts ſet them at eternal Odds; They are perpetually contending for Power, Wealth, and Honour; Envying, Supplanting, Overturning one another. And ſometimes it ſo proves, that the very Sparks of this hot Contention afford them Light enough to diſcern, (eſpecially when they are worſted by their Adverſaries, and defeated of their Hopes) that the Fruit of theſe things is nothing but Vanity and Vexation of Spirit. And this ſeaſonable Diſcovery of their Folly may (and by God's Grace often does) lead them to a Senſe of their Sins, and help to recover them out of the Snare of the Devil.

Nay, it is Obſervable, that to puniſh Sin by Sin, is one of the ſevereſt Scourges in God's Hand; and that which cauſes the moſt ſenſible Smart, and ſometimes the deepeſt Compunction. Thus when *David* was puniſh'd for his own Adultery and Murder by the Rebellion of his darling Son *Abſalon*, how was he abaſhed and confounded? * He fled away in great Conſter-

* 2 Sam. *ch.* xv. *and* xvi.

ſternation, he covered his Head, and went up by the Aſcent of Mount *Olivet*, Weeping and Bare-foot: and when *Shimei* came forth to meet him at *Bahurim*, and curſed ſtill as he came, ſaying, *The Lord hath delivered thy Kingdom into the Hand of thy Son* Abſalon; *and behold thou art taken in thy Miſchief, becauſe thou art a bloody Man*--- The Senſe of his Guilt, and the Weight of God's Afflicting Hand, made him ſubmit to the Indignity, and ſay patiently,-- *So let him Curſe:--- Behold my Son which came forth of my Bowels ſeeketh my Life, how much more may this* Benjamite *do it? Let him alone, and let him Curſe; for the Lord hath bidden him.* And thus, by the juſt Permiſſion, and wiſe Direction of a good God, Sin very ſharply and effectually corrects Sin; and one Man's Diſeaſe proves another Man's Cure.

It is further remarkable, that the Deſigns and Attempts of wicked Men, even when ſeemingly conniv'd at by Providence, and ſuffer'd moſt to proſper, have the more eminently conduc'd to God's Glory, and the Good of Mankind. Thus the unnatural Cruelty and Revenge of *Joſeph*'s Brethren, tho' proceeding from the worſt Intention on their Part, was by God *meant for Good*; and he was thereby put in a Capacity of harbouring and ſupporting his aged Father, and the whole Family in their Diſtreſs, and ſaving *much People alive*: And This was preparatory to a long Train of Wonders, by which their Poſterity were attended and conducted, out of *Egypt*, through the Wilderneſs, into the Land of *Canaan*. Thus the Diſper-

ſperſions and Captivities of the *Iſraelites* afterward, eſpecially their long Captivity in *Babylon*, help'd to ſpread the Knowledge of the true God far and wide, and to make his Name and Power confeſs'd among the Heathens, which gradually prepar'd the World for the Reception of the *Meſſiah* in the Fulneſs of God's due Time. Thus the violent Perſecution of the Chriſtian Religion, tho' level'd at its Extirpation, became (through the Invincible Fortitude and Patience of the Martyrs) a moſt glorious Teſtimony to its Truth and Excellency, and the marvellous Means of its more abundant Encreaſe. And ſo in many other Inſtances beſides, both of a publick and private Nature, the wicked Devices of Mens Hearts have been made ſubſervient to God's eſtabliſhed Counſel, and to very unexpected Turns of Providence, quite contrary to the Intention of ſuch evil Inſtruments.

And doubtleſs, that Forbearance of Sinners, which is not only calculated (as was ſhown before) for the common Benefit both of Good and Bad Men, but alſo productive of much unthought of Good beſides, and conducing to the fuller Diſplay of God's Glory, muſt be adjuſted according to the exacteſt Meaſures of Goodneſs, Wiſdom, and Juſtice. There can no poſſible Doubt remain of this, if we conſider,

(3.) That which we cannot but diſcern, *viz.* That there is a ſufficient Diſcouragement to Sin, notwithſtanding God's Patience and Long-ſuffering towards Sinners.

For

For when all is done, there is no such thing as Ease, or Peace, or Safety, for the wicked: Guilt will sit hard upon the Mind, and fill it with all-boding Thoughts, and frightful Apprehensions. And the very Expectation of Vengeance to ensue, is it self a present, and a grievous Torment. And this is so much the Effect of natural Conscience, that the Heathens themselves had a feeling Sense of it, and give us very affecting Descriptions of the troublesome Passage.

Plutarch sets it forth by an Illustration, which (by the way) gives light to a Passage of Scripture relating to our Blessed Saviour. *Every Malefactor*, says he, * Plutarch. Lat. Supra, citat. p. 559. "*that suffers bodily Execution, carries out his own Cross.*" "But Wickedness is the skillful Artificer, that of it self both furnishes and frames the Instruments of its own Misery; Shame, Fear, Remorse, and never-ceasing Perturbation and Distraction. And *Tacitus* † Tacitus. Annal. Lib. vi. imagines, that if the Breasts of Tyrants could be laid open, we might see them full of Lashes and Gashes; the Mind being as liable to be mangled and torn by Cruelty, Lust, and evil Machinations, as the Body is by the Stripes of a Whip. And *Juvenal* the Poet * Juvenal. Satyr. xiii, 192. &c. won't allow so much as the Thought, that those Men escape with Impunity, who are left under the secret Terror and Scourge of a guilty Mind, a Tormenter deaf to all Entreaty. And All the grave Heathen Writers concur in the same Sentiments. Now if such be the Horror of Guilt, as reflected from the Glass of meer Natural Conscience, much more must it be, when awaken'd and heighten'd by the Threatnings of that God,

God, who is *greater than our Hearts, and knoweth all Things.* So that in good truth, the Sinner doth not go unpunished, when he is left in his own Hands; because, as long as he carries a Conscience about him, he is sure to do severe Executions upon himself.

But besides, God's Temporal Judgments are very frequently executed upon incorrigible Sinners; so frequently, that it is enough to convince the Boldest of them all, that there is no Security in Sin. And sometimes they are so visibly mark'd with the very Character of those Sins for which they are punished, that they cannot but extort the Confession from such as are immediately concern'd, and Command the awful Regard of others.

So the cruel *Adonibezek* read his Crime in his Punishment, and said, *Threescore and ten Kings, having their Thumbs and their great Toes cut off, gathered their Meat under my Table: As I have done, so God hath requited me.* So the Haughty *Haman*, in Plotting the Destruction of *Mordecai* and the whole People of the *Jews*, became most unexpectedly the Author and Procurer of his own Downfal and their Establishment. So the vain *Herod* was eaten with Worms alive, and perish'd in a more miserable Manner than other Mortals, because he receiv'd the Blasphemous Applauses of the People, and gave not God the Glory. So the Arch-Apostate *Julian*, being mortally wounded by an Arrow from an unseen Hand, died with a *Vicisti Galilæe* in his Mouth, owning with Rage and Despair, that the Saviour, whom he had renounc'd, derided,

derided, and defied, was now his Avenger and Deſtroyer.

And, beſide theſe extraordinary Examples, it is Matter of common Obſervation made good by numberleſs Events, that bloody-minded Tyrants ſeldom die an unbloody Death; that Murder ſeldom paſſes undiſcover'd or unreveng'd; that the Oppreſſor and Extortioner, who is ſo *greedy of Gain, troubleth his own Houſe*, and *inherits* but *the Wind*—— an Eſtate that is hardly capable of Settlement or Entail——— and ſo in many other like Caſes. Daring and Preſumptuous Sinners therefore are ſo far from being exempt from God's Temporal Judgments, that they are in perpetual Danger of them.

But, however it may fare with them here, *Beloved*, (I uſe St. *Peter's* Words to you) *be not ignorant of this one Thing, that one Day is with the Lord as a thouſand Years, and a thouſand Years as one Day. The Lord is not ſlack concerning his Promiſe*, [no, nor yet his Threats] *as ſome Men count Slackneſs, but is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that All ſhould come to Repentance.* But if Men will continue obſtinately Impenitent, their *Damnation* neither *ſlumbreth* nor *ſleepeth*: It is but a Moment of Time, (nothing in God's Account, nothing in Compariſon of what is to follow) and They ſhall enter upon a vaſt Eternity, which no Numbers can reckon, nor Conception reach; an Eternity of Torments, Torments ſuch as no Heart can endure to think of, no Hope can mitigate, and nothing can prevent but a timely Repen-

rance. For which Repentance, though there is a Space allowed to the Sinner in this Life, yet it cannot be denied, if any Sense of Misery or dread of Danger can affect Men, that Sin is sufficiently discouraged, by the cruel Pangs of a guilty Conscience, by the frequent Execution of God's Exemplary Vengeance in this World, and the *fearful looking for of Judgment and fiery Indignation* in that which is to come. Which compleatly Demonstrates, what I propos'd, that there is a most admirable Temperature of Goodness, Wisdom, and Justice, in this whole Procedure.

II. As consequent upon this, I should now shew, that it is a very unjust Objection to a very kind Providence, to imagine that God's Patience and Forbearance is any Encouragement to Sin; and a most grievous Abuse for Sinners to make it so.

But this is so direct, and so necessary a Consequence from the former Proposition, that I need not spend Words or Time to enforce it. For if the whole Procedure be so perfectly agreeable to all the truest Measures of Goodness, Wisdom and Justice, as I have prov'd by divers Reasons, by one in particular (which was the last insisted on) that directly precludes this Objection; then it must be a notorious Abuse for Sinners, either to Think, or Act so unreasonably and perversely.

One would hardly imagine it possible indeed, that any Sinner in his right Wits should object against Providence for want of strict Justice; when 'tis plain, if Things were otherwise, he might much more reasona-

bly

bly complain for want of that Mercy, the Benefit of which he now Enjoys, or may at least, if he do not neglect it.

But, as God's Infinite Holiness makes it impossible that He could, so it is down-right absurd to think that He should spare Sinners, in such manner as to encourage them in their Sins, and lull them asleep in Security; when at the same time, He hath taken abundant Care to lay all possible Restraints upon them, that do not violate their natural Freedom; and to awaken them by the Checks and Menaces of their own Consciences, by the Terror of his Temporal Judgments, and the much more terrible Denunciation of Eternal Punishment.

And it is certainly the most preposterous Abuse of God's unmerited Goodness, for Men to construe it so much to his Dishonour, and force it, as it were, to minister to their own Presumption. When He is pleas'd to spare and to forbear, to wait for their Repentance and invite them to it, it is both Ingratitude and Insolence to conclude from hence, that He is a Tame and Easie Being, that may be insulted at Pleasure; and therefore to Sin against him with an high Hand, and cast his Laws contemptuously behind their Backs. It is Madness to forget that God is Just, because his Justice is temper'd with Mercy; it is Senseless not to consider, that to Trespass upon Infinite Goodness and Clemency is the most provoking Aggravation of Sin, and will at last be recompenc'd with a proportionable Punishment, that will be still encreasing as the Guilt encreases.

Vain is it then, for any presumptuous Sinners to think, that they *shall escape the Judgment of God*: Most wretchedly vain, to *despise the Riches of his Goodness and Forbearance, not knowing that the Goodness of God leadeth them to Repentance; but, after the hardness of their impenitent Heart, treasuring up to themselves Wrath against the Day of Wrath, and the Revelation of the Righteous Judgment of God.* If any can be so Ignorant, their Ignorance is grossly affected, or stupid; if any so Harden'd, their Obstinacy, it is to be fear'd, is incurable; if any so Desperate, their Punishment, sooner or later, will be intolerable.

III. I come now, in the last place, to intimate what Construction and Use Men, in Reason and Conscience, ought to make of such God's Dispensations; which I shall consider with a particular Regard to our selves, and the present Conjuncture.

1. And first, in framing a Judgment upon such the Dispensations of Providence, this should be an establish'd Rule, that how long soever Wicked Men may be suffer'd, or how prosperous soever Wickedness may seem to be, it ought not to be matter of Scandal to Us, nor tempt Us to charge God foolishly. This Rule is given Us by the Royal Preacher himself, *Eccles.* 5. 8. *If thou seest the Oppression of the Poor, and violent perverting of Judgment and Justice in a Province; marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest Regardeth, and there be higher than They.* And whenever these or any the like Enormities are permitted, tho' They are such as do much disturb the Quiet, and

and undermine the Safety of Societies, and therefore might seem to require the speedier Regulation; yet We may perfectly rest our selves upon this Assurance, that they are all under the Governance and Restraint of God's Over-ruling Power, and the Inspection of his All-piercing Eye; which, even whilst it seemeth to wink at them, is narrowly watching them; and that too, 'tis most probable, in order to their severer Punishment. But however, since God is a Vigilant Observer of These and all Others the Iniquities he permits, it ought to be a firm and standing Conclusion with Us, that such his Permission of Sinners is founded upon weighty Reasons; which tho' not presently obvious even to our serious Enquiries, much less to our vain Curiosity, must always be presumed to be right, Worthy of himself, and conducive to the great Ends of his Providential Government.

What then, tho' Oppression and Persecution be sometimes suffer'd to trample upon the Necks of the Innocent and Helpless? What, tho' Tyranny be sometimes permitted, like *a strong Man rejoicing to run a Race*, to make mad Havock where it Sways, and bear down all Law and Liberty with Violence? What, tho' the Ambition of Princes be sometimes cast as a Firebrand among the Nations, to set the Affairs of the World and the whole Course of Nature, as it were, all in a Combustion? Are not all these Scourges in the Hand of God? And is it any wonder, that he should employ such willing Messengers on his own Errand, and send Rapaciousness, Pride, and Cruelty, to visit for Prophaneſs, Carnal Security, and Hypocrisie?

pocriſie? And can God want to be juſtified, is he not ſufficiently clear when he judgeth, whoever they be, that are ordain'd to feel the Weight of his Judgments, or employ'd to be the Inſtruments of inflicting them?

We of this Nation have been ſubjected to the Alarms and Terrors, to the doubtful Contingencies and Events, to the certain and vaſt Expence of Blood and Treaſure, that muſt of neceſſity attend a tedious War; I ſay, (excepting the ſhort Interval of an inſidious Peace) we have been ſubjected to theſe Calamities of War for near twenty Years together: For War, be it never ſo Juſt and Honourable, is ſtill more or leſs Calamitous, and ought even to be reckon'd among the Judgments of God. But we can eaſily account to our Selves for all that We have ſuffer'd under it; and we muſt in all Humility confeſs, that God is juſt in viſiting Us with this Judgment, ſuch a ſinful People as we are; even tho' we ſhould take the Liberty to ſuppoſe our Enemies to be much greater Sinners than our Selves. For, as an Excels of Guilt in them is no Proof of our Innocence; ſo on the other Hand, their Forwardneſs to become the Inſtruments of annoying Us, is no Security to them, that they Themſelves ſhall not be deſtroyed: For ſo were the *Iſraelites* of old often and ſore diſtreſs'd by thoſe very Idolatrous Nations that were Themſelves devoted to Deſtruction.

And if the Enemy with whom we are chiefly engag'd, ſhould ſtill blindly perſiſt in his Hatred againſt

Us,

Us, and impotently drive on his furious Designs, now that Providence so plainly seems to have stopp'd his Career, may we not probably expect to see all the Enterprizes of an aspiring Reign concluded in his shameful and total Overthrow? At least, may we not hope to see this *Leviathan*, (*the King over all the Children of Pride*) who hath so long sported himself in the Ruin of his Neighbours, and fatten'd upon the Spoils of Nations; may we not hope to see him forc'd to disgorge his Prey, to give up his unjust Acquisitions, to revoke the Titles of Royalty he hath so vainly bestow'd, and to sue at last for an inglorious Peace, such as may for evermore bind up his Hands from troubling the Repose, or attempting the Liberties of *Europe*? And, if our own great Unworthiness do not hinder, doth not the happy *Crisis* seem now to be near approaching, when we may actually rejoice to see the long Arrears of Vengeance for Rapine and Bloodshed paid, where they are most due; and be excited, in a grateful Sense of our own Deliverance, to say with the *Psalmist*, *Verily there is a Reward for the Righteous, verily he is a God that judgeth in the Earth*? Oh! that we may but be found righteous enough to render us capable of so great a Blessing!

2dly. And this is the proper use that Men ought always to make of such God's Dispensations, *i. e.* to turn unto the Lord with their whole Heart, and flee from his Wrath into the Arms of his Mercy. For the Continuance of Favours undeserv'd, and the Suspension

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of deserved Judgments, is at once a kind Invitation, and a startling Summons, to Repentance, which not to hearken to must argue the utmost pitch of Ingratitude and Perverseness.

And certainly, if ever any Nation or Generation of Men were so graciously invited and summon'd to Repent, or so patiently waited for, *We* are that Nation and Generation:--*We* that have been so often spar'd when we might most justly have been punish'd: *We* that have been sometimes encompass'd with Dangers, and alarm'd with Judgments, hanging directly over our Heads, and just ready to fall upon Us with all their weight, and yet deliver'd by God's out-stretched Arm: *We* that have had so many Mercies multiplied upon us, so many mighty Works done for us, as might have converted a Nation of Heathens, and brought them long e'er now prostrate upon their Faces, repenting in Sackcloth and Ashes. And if, after all these repeated Calls, *We* can still continue Uncircumcis'd both in Heart, and Ears, surely we must have put off all sense of Shame and Fear, we must be the most abandon'd of all People, we must be entirely given up to an incorrigible Hardness of Heart.

And, if we are not already under that fatal Induration, it is doubtless high time to bethink Our selves, that Mercy abus'd, 'till it be incens'd, will admit of no Intercessor; and that Vengeance, long delay'd but still provok'd, will come upon us like a Fury at last, not to correct but to consume us.

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If therefore we have any true Sense of Liberty, any just Dread of Arbitrary Power, let us instantly shake off that heavy Yoke of Bondage, which our Tyrannical Lusts have laid upon us: If we have any Regard to our own Safety, let us break off from our Iniquities, which will otherwise be our Ruin: If we have any Reverence for God's Holy Name, any real Aversion to Popery, any Value for his true Religion establish'd among us, let us resolve to revive it both in Profession and Practice; let us agree, with one Mind, and one Mouth, zealously to defend it, let us study to adorn it by an irreprouchable Life and Conversation. And that the Reformation may be general and effectual, let us, all of us, High and Low, Teacher and Scholar, Magistrates, Ministers, and People, join Hand and Heart in this necessary Work: Let us, before all things, renounce, and, as much as in us lyes, rebuke and restrain that Spirit of Infidelity and Profaneness which vaunts it self so publickly, and defies all the Hosts of the living God; and let us endeavour to cast out that Spirit of Indifferency and Remissness too, that has been creeping upon us for some time by unperceiv'd Degrees, and has already in a great measure benumm'd our Spiritual Sense; and let us for ever *lay aside all Malice, and all Guile, and Hypocrisies, and Envies, and all Evil speakings*, which cause us, either to nauseate *the sincere Milk of the Word*, or thro' an ill Digestion to turn even our best Nutriment into Poison.

To be impartial, that no Accurſed Thing may ſeparate between us and our God, nor obſtruct our perfect Reconciliation, let us ſearch every One into the very Bottom of our Hearts, and tear from thence thoſe Boſom Sins, that make us at once Diſloyal Members both to Church and State. And where Licentiouſneſs has made the wideſt Breach, there let us be ſure to apply our ſpeediſt Care, and oppoſe the ſtrongeſt Bank; particularly againſt That Looſeneſs of Opinion that ſlides ſo eaſily into Practice, that removes every Check to Vice, and hath let in Univerſal Corruption among us; That Intemperance which overflows us like a Deluge; that Softneſs and Lewdneſs which emaſculates and enfeebles our Youth, and hath almoſt quench'd all the remaining Sparks of Virtue and Bravery; and (which of all things muſt not be forgotten) that moſt immoderate Degree of Uncharitableneſs and Bitterneſs, which eſtranges our Hearts from each other, and whets our Tongues like Swords, and hath carried our Diſſenſions to ſuch an amazing height, as makes the Heart of every true Lover of his Queen and Country bleed with Grief, and quake for Fear.

In ſum, let us ſet our ſelves to mortifie and ſubdue all our fleſhly Luſts, as this holy Seaſon of *Lent*, and this ſolemn Occaſion, do Both require. For, *whence come Wars and Fightings among you*, (ſays St. *James*) *come they not hence, even from your Luſts that war within your Members?* This is the natural Solution of all that Variance, Emulation, and Sedition, with which we are ſo divided, and diſtracted: Pride,

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that arrogant Uſurper; Ambition, that deſperate Climber; Coveteouſneſs, that haſty Gatherer; Luxury, that prodigal Conſumer; and Envy, that perpetual Murmurer; Theſe, theſe are the Troublers of our *Iſrael*, Theſe are the Incendiaries that ſet all on fire. Let us therefore withdraw the Fuel that feeds theſe raging Luſts, that they may no longer burn inwardly to our great Diſquiet, nor ever flame out to our Confuſion and Deſtruction; Let us *ſtudy* all *to be quiet*, and *mind* every one *his own Buſineſs* in his proper Station; Let us not be *wiſe in our own Conceits*, nor *mind high things*, but *with Brotherly Love in Honour prefer one another*. And let this be the only, but the noble Strife, among Brethren and Countrymen, who ſhall do moſt Good to the Publick; and who ſhall ſerve their Queen and Country with the moſt diſintereſted Zeal, and uncorrupted Fidelity.

And, for a Concluſion of all, let us, as St. *Paul* exhorts, put up our *Prayers, Supplications, Interceſſions and Thankſgivings, for* the Queen, *and all that are in Authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable Life, in all Godlineſs and Honeſty*; that We may never want the Shelter of their kind Protection, nor They the lawful Tribute of our Obedience and Submiſſion; that the Queen's Empire may be firmly Seated in the Hearts of all Her People, and the People's Duty ſolidly founded both upon Principle and Affection: That Religion (the beſt Guardian of Civil Society) may ſeaſon all our Counſels, and proſper all our Undertakings;

takings; that Mercy may diſtil upon us as the Dew, and Righteouſneſs run down as the Waters; that Probity and Equity may be the Standard of our Proceedings; that Knowledge and Wiſdom may be the Stability of our Times, and Union and Concord the Cement of our Government; and that the Glorious Succeſſes of War may be ſpeedily compleated in a happy Peace, never to be eluded by any Art, nor diſturb'd by any Violence; and laſtly (to crown all our Wiſhes) that all the Bleſſings we have been ſo gallantly contending for, may be tranſmitted ſafe to Poſterity, and that (according to the wiſe Proviſion of our Legiſlature) a Race of Proteſtants may never fail to ſway the *Britiſh* Scepter, as long as the Sun and Moon endure. *Amen*: And let all the People ſay *Amen*.

FINIS.